

## Austin Pan American Round Table

### HISTORY

*Excerpts of history written by Helen Frantz*



On January 30, 1922, twenty-two women met at the historic Driskill Hotel to form the 4th oldest table in the still fledgling Pan American Round Tables.

In the summer before, they had met with the fabled Clara Driscoll Sevier at her estate alongside the Colorado River - Laguna Gloria - to set in motion the plans which resulted in the founding meeting the following winter.

At the first regular meeting Mrs. Sevier was appropriately chosen as the Director General. At the formative meeting, the constitution and by-laws of the San Antonio Round Table were adopted. Each of the twenty-two charter members drew lots for a specific country, and was thereafter responsible for representing that nation at the table.

The first luncheon, held a month later at the Driskill, was no ordinary affair. The president of the University of Texas, R. E. Vinson, made an opening address, followed by Governor Neff himself, who reminded the women how much, in his words, "one is privileged to be at the beginning of things worthwhile." San Antonio saluted its new sisters by sending over a quartet of its Pan American Round Table leaders. Other distinguished guests included the governor's wife, the wife of the former United States Ambassador to Colombia (Mrs. Thad Thomson), and a small host of state judges, heads of commissions, and other state brass.

To emphasize the round table idea, the luminaries were seated about a round table in the center of the room, with the other members and guests grouped around smaller tables. As would become traditional, the festive flags of the Pan American nations provided the centerpiece.

## **Austin Pan American Round Table – History (continued)**

At the second monthly luncheon Mrs. Terry Griswold attended from San Antonio to talk about needs and aims. Five delegates came up from Laredo. Other speakers included Dr. Charles W. Hackett, the University's foremost Latin Americanist, and the Honorable Hal Sevier, who told of his representation of the United States in Argentina during World War I.

At the conclusion of the second luncheon, the delegates promptly reassembled for a "State Convention" to form and clarify state regulations. Of the first five honorary members, four were men, distinguished in some phase of Latin American endeavor. Also impressive is the large number of musical and dance programs, invariably staged in native costume and with elaborate matching table decorations. Since each woman was assigned to represent and study a specific country, the competitive urge meant that each also gained knowledge in depth of her particular area. The table became such an important part of the Driskill Hotel's life that it designated one of its meeting rooms as the Pan American Room.

Through the efforts of the women of the Pan American Round Table and in honor of Mrs. Sevier and Dr. Charles W. Hackett, the first twelve scholarships to Latin American students were established in 1940 to assist with the beginning efforts of the Institute of Latin American Studies at the University of Texas. The Charles Wilson Hackett Memorial Award and a matching Jeannie Hunter Hackett Memorial Award were established and are presented annually on Pan American Day. In 1946 the Table instituted a short term revolving loan fund of \$1,000 for Latin American students in financial distress. The fund is administered by the University of Texas.

After a period of "temporary inactivity" from May 1928 until November 1929, the table came back strong.

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